



LPJ9796

City of Violence



A d20 Modern Template

# master manipulator

Requires the use of the d20 Modern™ Roleplaying Game, published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

Bold lies. Clever bargains. Subtle threats. Sex appeal. These are the tools of the Master Manipulator, a silver-tongued schemer who uses charm, subterfuge, and uncanny wit to pursue his ambitions. He can be found almost anywhere, from the center of a sprawling criminal empire to the strobe-lit dance floor at a local club. This character relies heavily on his keen intellect and social acumen. By necessity, he thinks quickly, considering his options between breaths, choosing the best terminology, movements, and facial expressions to ensure that his words have the desired effect. His ability to weave language into complex, often indecipherable vortices makes him an effective negotiator and a trickster without equal.

The precise nature of the Master Manipulator's charm varies. Perhaps he's dedicated his entire life to understanding and influencing others, or perhaps he's just a natural darling. Perhaps some latent psychic potential aids him in affecting others. He might simply be drop-dead gorgeous, possessed of a godly physique or an angelic face. Whatever the source of his appeal, the defining quality of the Master Manipulator is a force that not only draws others to him, but also compels them to listen. When the Master Manipulator speaks, one can be certain that he commands the full attention of his intended audience. Few can resist his charms for long, as he is very good at convincing people they don't want to.

To the Master Manipulator, human behavior is simply a series of abstract forces reacting to one another in consistent, predictable patterns. This outlook affords him a certain degree of insight (*not to mention cynicism*) when dealing with others. Buried emotions, past mistakes, and repressed desires all lie just beneath the surface of every conversation, swathed in layers of decorum and pretty expressions. The Master Manipulator, however, sees through the veneer of propriety. He reads body language, phrasing, and even voice intonation in the same way an academic might read literature, instinctively examining context and subtext, probing for that which lies beneath it all. One's secrets are never safe from the Master Manipulator; he



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can discern an individual's motivations in the time it takes to voice a greeting and shake hands. And he is just as quick to exploit those motivations.

As his experience grows, the Master Manipulator's talents begin to verge on the supernatural. His suggestions become nearly impossible to refuse and he grows to be a master of turns of phrase, tricks of language, and nuances of meaning. Bargains and arrangements involving him end more and more often in his favor, and even those who should, by all rights, want to kill him might instead buy him a drink and indulge him in a bit of polite conversation. The expert Master Manipulator doesn't make enemies. He makes the most of his friends.

The Master Manipulator is an advanced class suitable for all modern campaign settings. The fastest path into this advanced class is from the Charismatic hero basic class.

## Profile of a master manipulator

The blonde on the television screen stood in a cluttered, dusty room, holding an upright vacuum cleaner that shimmered with silver light. Cartoon dust bunnies danced across the carpet at her feet to a once-popular disco tune. She smiled perfect white teeth and turned the vacuum on.

Tilly leaned back on the sofa and took a long drag from his cigarette. He stared over the small oak coffee table in the center of the room at the two Tong hitmen. Both stood stock-still and impassive, watching him through identical narrow, black sunglasses. They wore the same spiked hairstyle and matching goatees. Their long, black coats rippled gently, affected by the wide ceiling fan spinning silently overhead. The two were nearly indistinguishable from one another. Nearly. But Tilly could make out the tips of tattoos creeping out from underneath the sleeves of the hitman on his left. The other wore snakeskin boots.

The men had entered the small apartment in silence. He hadn't even heard the front door. They were professionals, confident enough in their abilities to show themselves to him.

"So, you're the unlucky bastards they sent to me." Tilly exhaled smoke and tapped ashes from his cigarette into a ceramic tray, shaped like a lotus blossom, on the coffee table.

"Mr. Wen sent us to deliver a message," Snakeskin said with a leer. His voice was strong and assured, his English perfect. "A nine-millimeter message. I don't think you'll like it."

Tilly smiled. So, essentially, they didn't even know why they'd been sent to kill him.

"A message," Tilly muttered. "It looks like we have something in common, then. You want to go first or should I?"

The hitmen stood still, unmoving.

"Before we get rolling, do you boys mind if I get a soda?" Tilly asked, beginning to stand. "Damned cigarettes make my mouth d—"

In an eyeblink, two silenced pistols were drawn, each leveled at a single spot in the center of his forehead. Tilly stopped moving.

"Alright," he said. "So, we'll wait. We deliver our messages first, and then I'll get a soda. So, who is going to tell me what Mrs. Wen has to say to me?"

There was a moment of hesitation, and the two men shared a quick, inexpressive glance. Both seemed about to speak, but neither seemed sure of who should.

They haven't worked together before, Tilly thought to himself. Probably don't even know one another. This is going to be a cakewalk.

"Here," he continued warmly, settling back onto the sofa, pausing to take another drag from his cigarette. "I'll start, since someone apparently thinks I'm going to die."

"Apparently?" Tattoos inquired, quirking an eyebrow.

"Yeah," Tilly said. "I'm sorry if I seem less than convincing, here, but when you do this stuff for as long as I have, it's hard. With the last set Wen sent, I just came out and spilled it, explained what was going on, you know? Not that it helped any."

The hitmen were uneasy now. They shifted their weight from foot to foot and adjusted their grips on their guns.

"The last set?" Snakeskin asked.

"Yeah." Tilly shrugged. "I guess the game is up, eh? Okay, think about it. Who am I? Who is it that Wen sent you to kill? Me? I'm just some guy sitting around a cheap apartment watching infomercials and smoking a cigarette. You didn't have any trouble sneaking up on me. Think about it. Do you really think Wen would actually need two trained hitmen to kill a guy like me? Look at me. I'm not exactly action hero material. No. You're not here for me. You're here because you pissed somebody off, probably Wen. And now it's time to die. This is just a convenient location, and I'm just the guy who's paid to clean up afterward."

"So how is it that you're supposed to kill us?" Tattoos asked. "Nobody else is here. Like you said, you're no hero. We could plug you before you could draw a piece. Even if you have friends next door or across the hall, they won't make it in time to save you."

"No, no," Tilly muttered, rubbing his temples, allowing his cigarette to bob slightly between his lips as he spoke. "You don't understand. I've got all the backup I need, right here. Go back and think about what I just said. I'm only talking to one of you. The other's just playing along, probably a little



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Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Defense Bonus	Reputation Bonus
1	+0	+0	+0	+2	Magnetic charm	+0	+1
2	+1	+0	+0	+3	Cunning	+1	+1
3	+1	+1	+1	+3	Bonus feat	+1	+1
4	+2	+1	+1	+4	Discerning gaze	+1	+2
5	+2	+1	+1	+4	Make clarifications	+2	+2
6	+3	+2	+2	+5	Bonus feat	+2	+2
7	+3	+2	+2	+5	Binding agreement	+2	+3
8	+4	+2	+2	+6	Rumor monger	+3	+3
9	+4	+3	+3	+6	Bonus feat	+3	+3
10	+5	+3	+3	+7	Bonds of Trust	+3	+4

pissed that I'm making his job harder. Not that it'll matter. Every time, Wen gets his corpse."

Tilly watched realization dawn on the two men, the quick twitch of the eyebrows that indicated initial comprehension, followed by the firm set to the jaw that reflected self-control gained at great difficulty. Both pretended not to understand, hoping to be the first to move. Then both guns swiveled and fired.

The hitmen fell at the same time, each bleeding from the chest. Snakeskin hit the corner of the coffee table, knocking over a stack of clay coasters. Tattoos tumbled forward, and as he fell, his temple striking Snakeskin's boots. His eyes were wide. Blood spilled from his lips, dribbling down into the front of his jacket.

Tilly sighed. Wen was onto him, then. It was time to skip town, to change the scenery. Maybe he'd go to Haven. He'd heard it was easy to get lost there. He would leave first thing in the morning, which meant he had to pack now. But first, he needed a soda. Cigarettes dried his mouth out.

## Requirements

To qualify to become a Master Manipulator, a character must fulfill the following criteria.

**Skills:** Bluff 6 ranks, Diplomacy 6 ranks, Sense Motive 4 ranks.

**Feats:** Deceptive.

**Charismatic Hero Talent:** Fast-Talk.

## Class Information

The following information pertains to the Master Manipulator advanced class.

## Hit Die

The Master Manipulator gains 1d6 hit points per level. The character's Constitution modifier applies.

## Action Points

The Master Manipulator gains a number of action points equal to 6 plus one-half his character level, rounded down, every time he attains a new level in this class.

## Class Skills

The Master Manipulator's class skills are as follows.

Bluff (*Cha*), Concentration (*Con*), Craft (*writing*) (*Int*), Diplomacy (*Cha*), Disguise (*Cha*), Gamble (*Wis*), Gather Information (*Cha*), Handle Animal (*Cha*), Intimidate (*Cha*), Knowledge (*behavioral sciences, business, civics, street-wise*) (*Int*), Perform (*Cha*), Profession, Read/Write Language (*none*), Sense Motive (*Wis*), Speak Language.

**Skill Points at Each Level:** 5 + Int modifier.

**Magnetic Charm:** A Master Manipulator may treat his levels in this class as additional Charismatic hero levels for any talent for which Charismatic levels are used (*charm, dazzle, fast-talk, etc.*)

**Cunning:** At 2nd level, the Master Manipulator has learned to think quickly when conversing or otherwise interacting with others. He can add his Intelligence modifier (*if positive*) to all Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidation skill checks.

**Bonus Feats:** At 3rd, 6th, and 9th level, the Master Manipulator gets a bonus feat. The bonus feat must be selected from the following list, and the Master Manipulator must meet all the prerequisites of the feat to select it.

Alertness, Attentive, Confident, Creative, Educated, Iron Will, Low Profile, Meticulous, Renown, Trustworthy, Windfall.

**Discerning Gaze:** The Master Manipulator is an excellent judge of character and motivation. Starting at 4th level, he receives a bonus to all Sense Motive checks equal to his Master Manipulator class level.

**Make Clarifications:** The Master Manipulator can recognize and salvage a potentially harmful social gaff by modifying and refining the offensive statement(s). At 5th level, he can retry any failed Bluff check to cheat, con, lie, or similarly obscure the truth. This second attempt, however, takes twice as long as the first.

**Binding Agreement:** Arrangements made by the Master Manipulator tend to withstand even the most duplicitous souls, possibly due to some unconscious sense of obligation or guilt on their part. When coming to an agreement with another character, a Master Manipulator of 7th level or higher can spend an action point to make it binding. In a binding agreement, characters consent to a particular set of terms, and they cannot renege. A character seeking to intentionally break the terms of a binding agreement must make a successful Will saving throw with a DC equal to 10 + one-half the Master Manipulator's class level (*round down*) + the Master Manipulator's Charisma modifier. Even if this saving throw is successful, renegeing characters suffer a -4 penalty to all attacks, checks, and saving throws made in the process of breaking the deal (*So, for example, if a character who agreed not to try to steal from another character tries to pickpocket her and cow her into inaction, he suffers a -4 penalty to the Sleight of Hand check to pick her pocket and a -4 penalty to the Intimidate check made to keep her from telling anyone. If he finds he has to beat her into submission, he suffers a -4 to his attack rolls.*).

**Rumor Monger:** Over the course of a discussion, a Master Manipulator of 8th level or higher can affect the way an individual feels about others. To do so, he engages a target in conversation and makes a Bluff skill check opposed by the target's Sense Motive check. For every full 10 points by which the Bluff check exceeds the Sense Motive result, the Master Manipulator may shift the target's attitude toward one character one level, either improving or worsening it (*e.g. indifferent to unfriendly, indifferent to friendly, etc.*). The character being discussed need not be present, but he must be known to the Master Manipulator. The change lasts until right after the target's next encounter with the character discussed. At the GM's discretion, the Master Manipulator may spend an action point to use this ability to influence a target's opinion of an object, organization, or even the target herself, in which case its effects last for a full day.

**Bonds of Trust:** At 10th level, the Master Manipulator's words take on an almost supernatural ability to inspire trust. He can attempt to charm any individual he talks to for a

number of minutes equal to that individual's Intelligence modifier (*with a minimum of one minute*). The target receives a Will saving throw with a DC equal to 10 + the Master Manipulator's Charisma modifier. If the saving throw fails, the target is charmed, as the charm person psionic power, for a number of hours equal to the Master Manipulator's class level. Bonds of Trust can only be attempted on any single target once per day, and the target must be able to understand the Master Manipulator's words.

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